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Gas Drilling in the Marcellus Shale Region

CWA Section 404 Enforcement – Wetlands staff conducted Clean Water Act, Section 404 inspections at 35 facilities of ten different companies associated with oil and gas extraction within the Marcellus Shale formation. Our inspection of these facilities has resulted in 24 enforcement actions and two referrals to DOJ. While these enforcement efforts will continue we have also begun Section 404 permit coordination with our Corps partners. Due to the anticipated volume of these permits, we have begun working with the Pittsburgh Corps to consider developing a Regional General Permit for these classes of activities. To help stakeholders better understand their Section 404 responsibilities, we plan to conduct industry outreach and training with our federal and state partners, including WVDEP, PADEP, WVDNR. Region 3 Wetlands staff and the USACE will also conduct training sessions (such as Wetland and Stream Identification, and Wetland Delineations training) to state regulatory officials so that state field personnel can recognize 404 regulated activities when conducting site visits on oil and gas facilities. Compliance Assistance workshops will be designed to train industry personnel on the 404 regulatory process on permit processes and regulatory agency authorities; identification of “Waters of the US”, mitigation and how these relate to Oil and Gas exploration.

Science and Monitoring - Staff from EAID continue to provide support to ORD's Hydraulic Fracturing Drinking Water Study. In addition, EAID's Wheeling based Freshwater Biology Team has deployed continuous conductivity data loggers in three watersheds with Oil and Gas development to determine baseline water quality conditions. The team will also collect samples at these sites for analysis of water quality parameters and benthic invertebrate samples for analysis of the condition of the invertebrate assemblage. This effort will help to work out design, logistical, sampling, and analytical issues and methods in watersheds with gas drilling and production activity. We will use the data and water quality parameters collected to determine baseline water quality conditions and monitor for elevated conductivity.

Laboratory Support - The Regional Lab is providing glycol analyses for all the retrospective and prospective studies to be conducted under ORD’s “Plan to Study the Potential Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing on Drinking Water Resources”. There are 5 retrospective study locations, two of which are located in PA, and 2 prospective study locations, one of which will be in Region 3. Lab staff continues to participate on the Analytical Methods subgroup for the Study. And, in a unique partnership between EAID and the Air Protection Division (APD), APD is funding an FTE for an Air Chemist to provide analytical support for their air monitoring studies and other efforts.

GIS and Data - EAID worked with our multi-media enforcement office to create a set of Marcellus related GIS tools and resources aid in enforcement targeting and inspections. The tools focus on Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The Regional Quality Assurance Manager has joined the region-wide Marcellus planning group to provide assistance and guidance to regional programs involved in QAPP preparation as well as identifying other areas where lack of QA may be an issue.

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